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The Function of Universities.

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AN ADDRESS

BY

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The Function of Universities.

Will universities ever become obsolete? Are they an integral element of an ideal state; or non-essential, and in the ages destined to be ephemeral?

The great Roman orator, who was proud to be called the Savior of his Country, said: "Times change, and we change with them." And certainly a picture of the eternal city as it was in his days, by the side of a photograph of the same city to-day, would confirm that exclamation. Where is the Forum? The Senate-house? Where the perpetual fire? Where the conquerors' triumphs? Where the subsequent, now ruined Colosseum? The largesses of bread and the circus? Where, indeed, the Appian Way? The Code Justinian?

It may be claimed that such mutations are superficial. Phenomena bubble up and burst, substance abides; clouds change their form, but the supply of heat and vapor is ever renewed, and

N.Y. (state) of

nature's clock never runs down. The Parliament House takes the place of the forum, the pulpit of the theater, the cathedral of the temple, and human passions still manifest themselves in work, and empty noise. Gesticulations and intonations perpetuate themselves, though the accents and articulations may vary. True it is that human nature and experience have a limited range, and history is, if not cyclical, spiral; yet within the limits in which it ever returns upon itself, lies all the territory that employs the sage, the statesman, the reformer and the philosophical historian.

The question then is still pertinent: Are universities essential or accidental? Had ancient Egypt anything parallel with a modern European or American university? If so, what good did it accomplish? If not, would it have saved the country? How did Greece and Rome meet the demands filled by these modern institutions?

That some institutions like what we now call universities have existed in all civilized communities, that they have been a cause and not a mere effect of advancing civilization, and that they have exhibited in origin and potency the peculiar elements of contemporary society, may be inferred from what scanty facts we have. But whether they will always abide, and, if so, what will probably be their future form, are themes prolific in thought and profit.

We are not now in the middle ages of little Europe, and can never reproduce its history. Once there

the monastery and the court were the two foci of whatever intellectual and moral forces existed, and the monastery perhaps developed into the university; but the days of crusades, knight-errantry, and the Inquisition have passed away. No longer do the most of the leading thinkers of the generation gather themselves in groups in cloistered walls or even university halls, while the great mass assemble about them to be bought and sold with the cattle, and housed, and fed, and milked, and shorn. As the striae on the bed-rock, and the boulders on the plains and hillsides betoken the long-passed glacial age, so the ruins of monasteries and castles in western Europe are traces of a social condition as truly forever past as the age of the ichthyosaurus and pterodactyl in the red mud of ancient marshes and forests.

But the castellated age witnessed the beginnings of universities. Are they, too, to become extinct as one of the relics of feudalism?

Our own age has its peculiar atmosphere, and we, being to the manor born, exult in it. We roll on our railways, toss on our steamboats, blow up and wash down mountains, speculate in fancy stocks, read our newspapers, discuss star mail routes and civil service reforms, politics, philosophy, agnosticism and religion, and flatter ourselves that the world has lately reached its maximum. Certainly the times change and we with them. But what of universities in this rolling, crashing, grinding age? Will they soon be left to be gazed

at, covered with debris, to be investigated by future archeologists? What is a university? I do not pause to determine what the word may first have signified, or ought to signify; but to us now, what body and soul does it present to our imagination?

It is easy to say what it is not. It is not the place by eminence, or one of a few places only, all of one kind, where nearly all the original thinkers of the race are congregated. It is not the spot where men still, like Abelard, the Friar Bacon, Huss, Luther, and Wycliffe project upon the world nearly all the thought that gives fashion to the times. Thought is no longer the privilege only of a few. The world is full of aroused mind. Were mind proved to be only some sublimated form of matter we might begin to fear that the whole globe would yet be evaporated and translated into a dream.

There is more aroused thought now in a single State of our Union than there was in the entire Roman Empire in the days even of Augustus Cæsar. Had we a psychometer to measure soul-force, as a thermometer measures active heat, we should find that the world of mind in the human race has undergone greater revolutions than the material globe, and that never before was there such a manifestation of original thought as now. Not only in schools, but elsewhere, thinkers of every grade associate themselves in parties too numerous to be remembered. Books are so mul-

titudinous that ere long a large library will be deemed a nuisance; periodicals of every season, from the annual to the semi-daily, perhaps soon to be followed by the hourly, force themselves like flies upon our attention; all are taught to read; the wildest theories have their propagators.

Nor are universities now recognized as endowed with authority to determine infallibly between truth and error, and to impose their decisions upon the community.

But universities are needed in the present age and in America, if possible, more than ever before. To regulate rather than originate, to discriminate, classify, select, and reject, to value and stamp, is becoming constantly a greater demand and necessity. The world is running wild with disjointed thought; and honest youths are lost in a wild babel of conflicting claimants. Can there be no guide? A university by common consent is understood to be the highest of all schools or collections of men who claim to be teachers and conductors in all the pathways of mental and material investigation. The faculty and their associates in instruction profess to be competent to instruct in their respective lines, and communicate all that can be taught. They really constitute the university. The incorporation, endowment, libraries, and apparatus of every kind, are simply to aid them in their high vocation.

Now for what are these institutions most needed? Not simply for original investigation.

In the modern arousal of intellect, stimulated by the renown of discoverers and inventors, and by the great wealth which is often the prize of a new application of science or art to material products, original thought has become a weed that obtrudes itself into every garden. Associations devoted to every kind of investigation, and rewards offered for every valuable increment to human power, sufficiently stimulate the fever for originality of expression and action.

Are universities needed simply to enable youth who have passed through the prescribed curriculum of a lower school to proceed indefinitely further under the leadership of trained guides in well defined and unvarying pathways nearly the same for ages, as in China, always looking backward, and hostile to the ever-varying demands of the outer world? Certainly this is not the ideal of an American university.

There can be no authority from without or above arbitrarily to make universities what it conceives they should be. Like agriculture and manufactures, art, science, and human government, they must become, under the free action of demand and supply, and experiment, and failure and success, what the forces of human endeavor shall make them. But it is the part of wisdom to form a clear idea of what they ought to be and do. First, undoubtedly they are to teach the most advanced of those who have still time to spend chiefly in learning and in being taught. Second, un-

doubtedly they should encourage the greatest degree and varieties of original investigation, needed by those whose function it is to teach what is already known, and also how to investigate. Third, and chief, they should show the true value or relative values of all knowledge and art of all kinds, ancient and modern, and be able to aid students to determine what they need to know, as well as to guide them after the track is chosen.

Ideally, the last demand is first and highest. Perfection in it implies omniscience and absolute justice and unlimited benevolence. Therefore, to a university made up of fallible men it is forever unattainable. Nevertheless it is the part of wisdom to aim at perfection. What and why, as well as how to study, require investigation.

There may yet come a recoil against science and art and culture, so called, as against religion; and then universities will be needed to stand in the breach, as the church stands against secularism and animalism. Symptoms of this possible onslaught of refined barbarism are not wanting; and indeed, in other ages, it has frequently appeared, with the usual variations in form, but always tending to disintegration and destruction. Civilizations have had their ebbs and subsidences and destructions; and perhaps the noisy and pretentious utilitarianism of the nineteenth century may follow their example. If so, what is to follow?

There are many who seriously question the value of popular education. By some it is claimed

that our public schools actually increase the aggregate of discontent and crime. How long before a graver charge may be brought against our higher schools? If the outcome of honest thought is pessimism, why should the world hurry the catastrophe? If rotting must follow ripening, why be anxious for the harvest? If all material nature is as destitute of plan and design as the disorderly mixture in the refuse of a kitchen thrown into a slop barrel, why should scientists spend their own time and ask the attention of others to stirring it up unnecessarily? If nominalism be really the true philosophy, and there is absolutely nothing beyond names, why should men puzzle themselves to create and quarrel over classifications which are simply hallucinations? If all things are evolved without an Evolver, and in the last analysis, evolution and devolution, improvement and abasement, sanity and insanity are identical, why harass ourselves with what has no beginning, nor ending, nor form, nor reason, nor soul? If scientific and metaphysical and religious discussions alike are as worthless as the chattering of apes, why persist in the chattering? Ought not the commune, the great all of humanity who may be supposed to have common sense, to determine how much and how little of this amusement to allow, and take efficient means to enforce its will?

These interrogatories suggest the proper functions of universities. They ought to be fountains

of the soundest, highest, and best of thought and culture to the people. They should fear nothing so much as either inferiority or bewilderment. They should not shrink from the most difficult of problems; they should have courage. They should be able to discriminate between the valuable and the unessential, and honestly and bravely defend the best. If they do this they will never become obsolete.

During the palmiest days of European universities, when confessedly they exerted their greatest power as guides of the nations, the wonderful writings of Aristotle were studied with a reverence that almost betokened a belief in their inspiration. Perhaps the reaction against them, begun by Lord Bacon, has led to too great neglect of some of the subjects discussed by the great Stagirite, the most comprehensive mind, take it for all in all, that has appeared among men. No better discipline could now be received than to examine thoroughly his general outline of all thought, with the illustrations and corrections and enlargements of history. And why should not all our students in the university be aided thoroughly to trace out the wonderful power in the world, alike of the Hebrew commonwealth and expectation, followed by the Christian faith and virtue and philanthropy, as well as the effects of Grecian philosophy, Roman law, medieval art and modern discovery and investigation?

Universities that neglect the highest problems

are gradually digging their own graves, and preparing themselves to be bowed out of the company of recognized factors of the world. There is an instinct that demands leadership. The people seek to find and follow creators. To elect is not to create, but to find and designate and acknowledge. It matters not how our universities may be established, whether by individuals, associations, the church, or the state; but when established we desire them to be in advance of their founders, as we desire a president to be superior to those who appoint him. Whether in the constitution, written or by common consent, there should be a wide range for benevolent activity. The university is created to be an investigator, sifter, and promulgator of sound thought. It should rather be creative than destructive, though each aim is necessary. It should and will attract to itself the sympathy of the best minds; by its evident honesty of purpose and unquestioned strength.

I do not therefore regard universities as in danger of becoming obsolete. Society can never outgrow them. They are as eternal as the race. They are practically schools with no upward limitation, and they will be needed as long as there is truth to discover and men to be taught.

But nothing unchangeable is permanent in exact form. Whatever is to abide must accommodate itself to ever varying demands. Is there not a demand in American society which perhaps

universities, better than any other agency, might volunteer to supply?

Is there not needed a comprehensive, impartial summing up from time to time of the thought, discovery, aims, and ability of the times, which, compactly and lucidly set forth, would direct the great leaders of the people in Church and State? Whence could this come so properly as from a university?

Such problems as the proper adjustment of appointed to elected officers in this great republic, commonly called the civil service reform, or the relations of mining to agricultural industry in California, where they seem to oppose each other; or the great question of a proper adjustment of American civilization to Asiatic emigration, call for a comprehensive and lucid setting forth that should be so thorough, so clear and so honest, that, however much criticised, its truth would be acknowledged and in course of time its recommendations would be obeyed. Now, I ask, whence could this come so well as from a university?

But I have no room in an address to elaborate these suggestions. Permit me to say that I have been too long engaged in university life not to be in full sympathy with it. It was my good fortune and great pleasure to labor for and in perhaps the strongest, because the oldest and best managed of our State Universities, while it was passing through some of its hardest experience. It con-

quered a position universally regarded as victorious and felicitous. It has frequently demonstrated its right to live. I can see also the peculiar incentives and difficulties of such an institution in this State.

From one point of view our State is one of the oldest in the world. It is the product of the oldest thought, and therefore ought to be the best.

The anonymous author of the "Vestiges of Creation," half a century ago, well said: "The United States might be expected to make no great way in civilization till they be fully peopled to the Pacific; and it might not be unreasonable to expect that when that event has occurred the greatest civilization of that vast territory will be found in the peninsula of California, and the narrow strip of country beyond the Rocky Mountains." This certainly is a sagacious prophecy, probably of a Scotchman. The peninsula of California as yet makes no great impression on the world. Perhaps it will soon be heard like the cracker of a whip. But "the narrow strip of country beyond the Rocky Mountains," not so very narrow after all if Scotland is to be taken as a measuring line, is fast filling up. We are beginning to conquer a place in the attention of the world; we are conscious of a destiny to come.

With this view, in common with you all, I hope for a noble development of all the educational institutions of our Pacific Coast.

And among them all, none has a grander opportunity than this University of California. Here on this beautiful bay, with the great arms of the State on the right and on the left, and the continent behind it, and already strongly founded, I trust it will be conspicuous among its associates, the leader of leaders, the mother of well trained intellects and hearts, and worthy of honorable mention and memory among the renowned universities of the leading nations in the world.



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